NEW MODULAR REFUGEE HOMES SITE

By Liam Timmins

In common with other Galway communities like – Gort, Loughrea, Kinvarra, Athenry – Ballinasloe is being earmarked to assist with the nationwide campaign to temporarily house War Refugees from the Ukraine.

A four-acre Poolboy site, located across from KPW Print and adjacent Western Post Form Premises, has been listed as a site of interest for temporary modular homes of Ukrainian refugees and the OPW are now surveying its feasibility for use.

The Galway County Council land is zoned as a R1 priority site for local Social and Affordable housing.

The Modular Home facility will be built and managed by Minister Joe O'Brien's Department, beginning with a series of briefings provided first to local Councillors and afterwards an extensive leaflet drop and email briefing those in the locality on what is being done with the site, who is coming, and the provision of services provided to them.

Extensive engagement with the HSE, Department of Education, local development companies and Galway Rural Development will ensure they have the facilities and resources required.

Director of Services Liam Hanrahan informed the Councillors at a recent MDC Meeting they will not be asked to approve the plans. "Councillors have no role to play other than act as information carriers. Galway County Council have no executive role in shaping or delivering this facility as it has been taken in charge by the State through the OPW vis a vis Emergency Powers."

While emphasising they had a right to ask questions - all six Councillors were unanimous in welcoming local relief to the plight of Ukrainian refugees with Parsons, Dermot Connolly, and Cathaoirleach Geraghty on record of supporting the humanitarian cause.

Cllr Parsons requested that written assurances of emergency resources in Health and Education be provided to them. "As we already have a well recorded deficit of services locally in primary health care, in hospital beds, in teachers and school places, mental health services, we need guarantees that the arrival of any group will not have huge negative impact, moving local people further down the line unfairly."

There is no timeframe available currently and it is understood that serious issues have been discovered in preliminary assessments, questioning the viability of the project in that location.

Mr. Hanrahan stressed 5,000 Ukrainian refugees have been securely living in Galway in harmony with their communities without displacing service users. He confirmed Cllr. Tim Broderick's query that this will be the first modular home facility in the county but emphasised other examples of their recent deployment in Dublin, Sligo and Claremorris.

The Director elaborated, from his understanding, that the site will return to the ownership of the Council upon war's end and the refugees return to their homeland for local social and affordable housing use.

As there is no MDC or County Council full meeting in August (by the September meeting, the units could be in place). The Director of Services gave his personal undertaking that the Councillors will be briefed and met before anything else significant occurs.

A fuller account summary of the proceedings of this agenda item is contained on the Ballinasloe LIFE Facebook page – 27th July.

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